

State of Things

by belncaz

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Summary: Akashi Seijuro & Kuroko Tetsuya are the princes of Rakuzan and Seirin. They're entering an arranged marriage to strengthen their kingdoms & will rule the newly joined land of Teiko. Unfortunately, there are just a few small problems: palace gossip, external threats challenge their rule, and of course, they used to be lovers. So, the state of things? A little complicated.

1. Chapter 1

A/N: For AkaKuro Week 2016 â€" although I horribly mismanaged my time and didn't finish it. So here's what I have so far.

Rating: T for eventual: themes of romance, some mild cursing, and vague references to violence.

State of Things

The nobility of Rakuzan and Seirin were used to bearing witness to high-stakes marriages between members of elite families. It was the way of their world, to marry according to the matchmakers' predictions and family interests â€" so there was nothing especially unusual in their assembling to celebrate the union of two people that didn't particularly love one another. Sometimes a couple was fortunate and developed fondness, or even love, between them. Other times, the best that could be hoped for was a wary respect. And rare though it was, there were cases where blatant animosity was the norm. These situations were unfortunate, but were endured to uphold the best interests of the aligned families.

If, however, there was ever a celebration ball where the guests could tell the newlyweds did not care for one another, it wouldn't be this one. If anything, it seemed the occasion was one of true love and romance â€" a welcome accompaniment to the political advantages of a

royal wedding. Princes Akashi Seijuro and Kuroko Tetsuya, of Rakuzan and Seirin respectively, had mutually agreed to hide their dislike for each other in order to better assure their citizens that the soon-to-be unified kingdoms would bring stability and prosperity for all of them. They smiled graciously and even lovingly at one another, accepted the well-wishes of the courtiers, and with subtly arranged but premeditated efficiency, hinted they were delighted by this occasion. As neither of the princes were easy to read in normal circumstances, their subjects took these calculated displays at face value on the assumption the pair was truly fortunate and in love.

They had a slight advantage with their performances, certainly. They had after all, once upon a time that is, been quite truly in love and simply dusted off the once-familiar gestures that had previously come so naturally to them. But that of course had been before things changed and they grew apart from each other. To those gathered that evening to celebrate this engagement, however, it seemed the pair had merely needed a small nudge to resume their true feelings. It was with a sense of relief, nostalgia, and genuine delight that the onlookers took in the seemingly genuine romantic element to this marriage.

They'd known each other since childhood. Rakuzan and Seirin were neighboring kingdoms and the princes had been born only a month apart, with Akashi Seijuro arriving at the close of one year in December and Kuroko Tetsuya signaling the glad tidings of a new year in the following January. Their parents visited often and socialized their children early on, in the hopes of strengthening the alliance between them. They hadn't necessarily intended for their sons to marry, a close friendship would have been sufficient, but that had been before the threats from widespread illness, warring factions in nearby kingdoms, and increasingly dire prophecies from the fortunetellers contributed to an uneasy malaise in both their kingdoms. The people needed a symbol of hope and strength. They needed a royal wedding. And when it came down to it, they had loved each other once, wasn't it possible for the spark to reignite?

The reigning monarchs of both kingdoms, sensitive to the dispute that had ended their sons' relationship some years before, hadn't forced this union on their children. They had quietly suggested it " in voices that were heavy with responsibility and tradition, but from fondness as well " to their progeny after both kingdoms had fallen prey to an agricultural blight. It had been hoped they would understand the wisdom of shared resources and the increased strength the unification would bring as marauders had begun attacking their borders. The princes weren't stupid; they'd each anticipated something of this nature would arise eventually. Seijuro and Tetsuya had agreed, after a private conversation between them, to do what they could for their people. That was what it meant to be royal after all.

Following an engagement of only two months, Akashi and Kuroko had been married just that afternoon in a small ceremony at a shrine that included the rites and blessings that were traditional in their kingdoms, but had little fanfare. They'd agreed that it would be more practical to save the spectacle for a party after the wedding and had left the details in the hands of the many talented servants at their disposal. Despite the fact they were at best reluctant allies in this endeavor, they'd both been sincere as they asked for the priests to

bless the union and their future rulings.

While the wedding itself had been fairly simple and witnessed only by a select handful of trusted friends and retainers, the celebration after the ceremony was another matter altogether. The ball was lavish and joyous, with tendrils of cautious hope finding root in the fertile ground provided by the princes' superlative acting. All told, it spoke to how dismal things had been getting that the guests' excitement was so easily seen. Akashi was seated next to his husband at a massive table that faced outward to see the assemblage gathered below. Long tables placed against one of the walls held platters of food that was fetched and served to various guests as needed and beyond that there was an archway that separated the dining area from the dancing floor. He and Tetsuya would soon find themselves there, under the approving gazes of their parents and an assortment of well-wishers ranging from trusted confidants to more distant acquaintances. He glanced sideways but Tetsuya's expression didn't give him any clues "not that he really needed them" they were of like minds in this, if nothing else.

Soon there was a signal from the herald and he and Tetsuya stood in near-tandem. They faced one another and offered respectful bows in turn, before Akashi extended a hand to guide his spouse to the dance floor. It was a terribly old-fashioned and unnecessary gesture "Seirin's prince was of course able to walk perfectly well without Akashi's assistance, but it was one of a hundred different ploys they'd planned to use to lend credence to their act.

Kuroko was dressed in a kimono designed to showcase muted greys and blues with striking accents of red and gold that echoed the tones of his husband's gaze. Akashi's garments were a deep red and golden design with soft touches of color scattered throughout that matched Tetsuya's eyes and hair. The robes were naturally a matched set and their stylish glamour spoke of the symbolic nature of their union as few other things could. Together they were the light of the sun, the coolness of water covered by mist, and the shining possibilities of an unknowable future. The fabric was finely crafted, commissioned for this event some weeks prior, and they both felt the metaphoric weight of their obligations woven into their clothes as naturally as the threads themselves.

The two stood in the middle of the dance floor, listening as the plaintive oboe joined the lilting strains from a lute and the steady beat of a drum. The music was a haunting invitation to imagine their kingdoms' ancient histories, and the rhythms and melodies wove around the entire room to hold them all in thrall. The princes knew the steps of this dance from muscle memory earned long ago, having been trained nearly from the cradle in both western and eastern courtly arts. So naturally, when Akashi again extended his arm, it was more instinct than anything else that led Kuroko to entrust his hand to Akashi's care, and they began a careful pattern of circling one other in time to the music. They maintained eye contact and the soft whispers of the onlookers may have suggested the pair was entranced with each other as they seemed oblivious to everything else.

They hadn't fooled everyone, though. Or perhaps more precisely, there were some that knew the truth of the situation and watched the two young princes with something akin to worried resignation. Their parents certainly were among this number. But they both had others in their lives that were privy to their secrets. Midorima Shintaro, who

was a healer and advisor to Akashi, was one such person and he watched the pair dancing with a somewhat grim expression.

"Midorimacchi, you're going to ruin the celebration if you can't at least pretend to be happy about it." Kise Ryota was another member of the inner circle " he was a charming blond that served somewhat informally as a diplomat and spy. The son of a noble family, he'd grown up with both Kuroko and Akashi and been a frequent playmate along with the others that had come to be known as the Generation of Miracles for their charm, intelligence, mastery over the courtly arts, intelligence, and athletic prowess. They represented some of the brightest talents of the two kingdoms and had found their way into a friendship " at least at times.

Guarded green eyes glanced momentarily over at the interloper before he replied. "I'm exempt from these foolish displays of emotion you seem to delight in. Nobody would believe them from me anyway."

Kise nodded his head agreeably enough in response. His sharp amber eyes found the dancing couple easily enough and he admitted that if Kurokocchi hadn't warned him ahead of time even he might be deceived by this seemingly perfect reunion between the couple.

The pair was soon joined by Aomine Daiki and Kagami Taiga " both of whom were powerful warriors from high ranking families who'd grown up in the princes' inner circles. Although he was fond of Kuroko, Aomine was really part of Akashi's retinue, while Kagami's loyalty was ultimately to Kuroko. They sometimes managed to get along with each other, but it was the exception rather than the rule. The two volatile men were united however, much like their masters were at the moment, in this effort to protect the future of their people.

Not being able to leave well enough alone, Kise teased the pair with a quiet, "The two of you match them, you know. Did you do it on purpose?" He was building on the fact they were also red and blue haired and their uniforms were more functional versions of what Akashi and Kuroko were wearing.

Red and blue eyes glared in the blond's direction. Aomine answered in a muted snarl, "It was Satsuki's decision and we had to go along with it."

Kagami nodded his head sharply. "That woman refuses to take no for an answer. She got Riko on board and then there was no helping it. They both think it reinforces the message of unification."

Momoi Satsuki was an intelligence officer for the Akashis, Aida Riko was her counterpart for the Kurokos. But to say they simply gathered information was rather understating the case. They were skillful tacticians in charge of training and overseeing all manner of operations in their respective kingdoms " and the women were renowned for their strong personalities and intellect as they pursued their tasks with diligence and enthusiasm. A task like coordinating outfits between two nobles that didn't like each other was mere child's play, and Aomine and Kagami had known it from the moment they saw the glint in their eyes.

Rather than continuing the small jibe, Kise merely shrugged with some humor evident in his expression and resumed watching Akashi and

Kuroko. The pair was occasionally speaking, but it was impossible to know what they would converse about at this moment. Whatever it was, they managed to do it with enough presence to make it seem the kind of exchange that should precede a hurried exit in search of whatever private corner they might stumble upon first.

"Remember to breathe, Tetsuya. You are starting to look less in love and more ready to attack me." Akashi's voice was amused but there was a sharp bite to his comment as well.

Kuroko's expression remained the same — a gentle smile gracing his lips and a faint shine that most were taking for affection in his eyes — but he obeyed the prompting and took a steadying breath.

"I have no reason to attack you, Akashi-kun. We agreed to this, together." His voice was as flat as it usually was, but they hadn't known each other this long for Akashi to be so easily duped.

He bent his head and spoke softly into Kuroko's ear, a deliberate move since they were in no danger of being overheard, and whispered in a tone that was one part promise, one part threat, and strangely enough, one part reassurance. "Tetsuya, we both know it isn't as simple as that. We agreed, but tell me, how far do you expect that promise to carry us when we retire for bed this evening?"

Kuroko blushed at Akashi's words, a charming reaction that earned several delighted giggles from their audience. He was also somewhat surprised to find they were still dancing, still smiling at each other, still surrounded by the hundreds of guests that had all eagerly accepted their invitations to this coveted event. It seemed everything should have stopped at Akashi's words, but strangely they had not.

There it was — the mention of their wedding night. It wasn't that Kuroko was afraid, but he hadn't exactly allowed himself to think past the wedding itself. There had been too many complicated meetings to get through and mountains of obscure legal documents related to the merging of their kingdoms to decipher to fret about the wedding night because after today Rakuzan and Seirin would be no more. Instead they'd agreed to rename the land "Teiko," in honor of the shrine by that name that had hosted a mutually beloved tutor for them when they were younger. They would spend half of each year in the palaces that were already in place and govern the land together, with their parents stepping down from the thrones once the couple completed their honeymoon.

Because they were both men, the traditional practice of viewing their consummation that night had been waived. There was no need to test for virginity nor any real reason to ensure either of them could perform their martial duty by one another. It was common enough for royal partners to be of the same gender either by preference or by expediency so that the precedents were already in place. They could either adopt a child that would be seen as part of their bloodline, or select an heir from among the offspring of the various branches of their relatives. And everyone suspected that they had already been intimate with each other when they'd been together in their teens. If for whatever reason one or both of them was unable to bring satisfaction to the other now, well, the use of a concubine wasn't an unheard of practice.

While Kuroko didn't answer, they both knew it didn't particularly matter. They'd discussed this, too. Of course they had. Kuroko remembered being seated across from Akashi in a small parlor that was rarely used, and for the first time in years they were alone together. They'd known before they went in the room that ultimately they would emerge engaged, but the details, compromises, and boundaries, those needed to be negotiated first. It was a contract between them yet it existed only by their mutual honor and acknowledgment that no matter how things had ended before, they did retain enough respect for each other to uphold their ends of the deal. Anything after that, time would have to take care of.

Yet as they'd sat there, with the weak winter light streaming through a window, it had naturally been Akashi who first brought this issue to the table. They'd outlined plans for their living arrangements and expectations in the most general of terms up to that point, before Akashi had finally tilted his head and asked his questions, "And will you be my husband in truth, Tetsuya? Will you share a bed with me? Or will we find physical satisfaction from others?"

Kuroko had refused to allow Akashi a victory by seeing him flinch from those words, but he'd definitely been unsettled by them. He'd stared unblinkingly at his former lover, and now future husband, for a long moment while gathering his thoughts. "Akashi-kun, I am not ready to resume a carnal relationship with you. However, I am not so foolish as to mandate we stay away from each other for the entirety of our lives together either. We have no way to know what the future holds for us in that regard. But I am not so weak as to immediately forget the past. It is neither my wish nor my right to deny you the opportunity to seek out someone if you desire it. I would expect the same courtesy. But as far as the foreseeable future goes, I do not intend to sleep with you."

Akashi had smiled at this response but it wasn't kind. He'd stood and walked calmly over to Kuroko, leaning down to cage the other male in his chair with his arms, forcing blue eyes to meet his directly as he spoke. "Would it merely be a courtesy for you, Tetsuya? A simple exercise of politeness? If so, you have lamentably forgotten the lessons we learned together to provide such a tepid label. Perhaps one day you will allow me to refresh your memory. But otherwise, I agree. It is too soon. We'll strike a separate bargain here â€" neither of us will seek out another, at least until we decide more permanently what we wish for ourselves, yes?"

As they continued their carefully orchestrated movements around the dance floor, Kuroko could tell from the flash of heat in Akashi's eyes at that moment that the redhead was remembering their promise, too. It had seemed a more solid barrier when it had been stated then, but Kuroko was unable to forget the last line Akashi had tossed out before he removed his arms from Kuroko's chair: "And to be perfectly clear, Tetsuya, I intend to make sure you change your mind in favor of it, sooner rather than later. I'm reserving the right to pursue you by any means except for force â€" there's no sport in that anyway. But I don't intend to lose this contest."

And Kuroko hadn't been able to do anything other than nod. Akashi had smiled with a glimmer of something like triumph in his red and gold eyes before he backed away from Kuroko and resumed their negotiations from his own chair.

The song finally ended, and they halted perfectly on cue. They bowed to their guests and began making their way back to the platform " the others would do the dancing from here.

It seemed the night sped forward from there, but it was actually several hours later before they were finally ushered off to their newly established residence within the Rakuzan castle. It had a large common room, two dressing rooms, two bathing chambers, and two bedrooms. It was in some ways a perfect metaphor for their lives at the moment " joined but still ultimately distanced. A similar suite existed at Seirin's palace. There was nothing particularly unusual about this as it was the traditional arrangement for married couples so that they had their choice of sleeping arrangements. For the two of them, however, seeing the doors that led into separate rooms was something of a provocative moment. The air seemed to thicken with an unstated challenge and the poignant ghosts of their past.

Akashi leaned against the doorframe of his room and arched an eyebrow at his husband. It was an expression of concern that was almost painfully familiar.

Kuroko shook his head at the silent question. He was fine and didn't need anything.

With a silent shrug, Akashi entered his room and closed the door behind him. Kuroko did the same on his side. It wasn't lost on either of them that they still had this " the ability to converse without saying a word " despite everything else. It wasn't the worst wedding night to ever happen, but it certainly wasn't the happiest either.

2. Chapter 2

CHAPTER 2

When Kuroko woke the next morning, he was greeted by the sight of his new husband's profile staring intently out of the window. The sunlight was gentle at this hour and provided a soft halo that lent a rather fetching aura to the already attractive redhead. Kuroko sighed quietly, he supposed Akashi had a reason being there but he doubted he'd like it.

Having heard the soft exhalation, Akashi turned and looked at him. He smiled at the expectedly atrocious bedhead but refrained from commenting " Tetsuya was not a morning person. "Good morning, Tetsuya. I'll wait here while you wake up a little; we have a small crisis on our hands that we need to address once you're more alert."

Kuroko grumbled his acknowledgment and rolled out from the warm blankets before stumbling to the attached bathing chamber. Akashi could hear him moving around and from experience ticked off each item in the blue haired man's routine. It was as he expected when Tetsuya emerged " having quickly bathed and refreshed himself " looking more awake but not necessarily happy about it. He had donned a morning robe of light gray embroidered with a pattern of dragons flying among clouds along the hemline and collar.

Akashi waved to the small table in Tetsuya's room; it had a pitcher

of hot drinking chocolate along more traditional breakfast items. After taking a seat, he looked askance at what was tantamount to a bribe, but he didn't refuse it, merely poured some into his cup and lightly stirred in a little vanilla-laced cream. It was one of his few extravagances, in all other things Seirin's prince was noted for his rather subtle style and preferences.

Akashi let his husband enjoy the warmth of the beverage and waited for its soothing flavor and gentle rejuvenation to take effect before speaking. He was rewarded for his patience when a few minutes later, Tetsuya looked up again and his expression was alert.

"Good morning Akashi-kun. What situation is so dire that this," he waved at the breakfast preparations, "was called for? And won't you join me?"

A small smile crossed Akashi's face. "No, thank you, I have eaten. It is the day after our wedding after all, surely if there was going to be a time to wake up to breakfast in your room it would be this one." He shrugged before continuing, the slight bit of humor disappearing. "An emissary from Hanamiya's kingdom arrived, demanding to speak to us."

Kuroko paused in the midst of taking another sip of his drink as he looked at Akashi. "Demand is a strong word, Akashi-kun. What is prompting such urgency that this messenger is being so impolite, especially when our rank is equal to his master's?"

Hanamiya was prince-regent of his kingdom and he had been for several years. Kirisaki Daiichi considered their royals to be minors until they married and had children, no matter their actual age. So while he had all the powers of Kingship, Hanamiya was snidely referred to as the Uncrowned King because he couldn't officially ascend to the title until he married and produced an heir — a thought that had many ladies in Kirisaki Daiichi making quiet plans to flee to other realms for sanctuary. Akashi and Kuroko however, would take the official ruling title much sooner — their parents had been ready to have the ritual of coronation alongside the wedding but the princes had deferred the offer.

Akashi nodded his appreciation of Tetsuya's understanding of the situation. "It is also troubling he would appear so soon after our nuptials with this aggression when Hanamiya himself declined to attend either the ceremony or ball. He wouldn't say what his business was yet, communicating only that he would need to see the both of us immediately. He got here at dawn, naturally, I have let him cool his heels a bit — you needed rest and certainly we are not going to make it seem that we are intimidated by Hanamiya."

Kuroko smiled a little, this was very like Akashi-kun after all. "Very well, I will change and we shall go see what the fuss is all about." He started to push back his chair but Akashi was there in a moment and quietly pulled it back before he extended a hand to Tetsuya to help him rise. Kuroko took the assistance but he sent a look that said all too clearly what he thought of this gesture. "Akashi-kun, breakfast is too early to start your campaign."

The redheaded prince smiled and murmured. "If you think I waited until breakfast, you have not been paying attention these last few weeks. I shall have to increase my efforts to ensure they are not so

easily overlooked in the future." He brought up the hand he still held captive and placed a brief kiss on Kuroko's knuckles before letting go. "And breakfast is certainly not too early, we must begin as we mean to go on after all" my intentions have already been explained."

Kuroko sighed quietly before responding. "I have not forgotten, nor did it go unnoticed. But one thing at a time Akashi-kun." He didn't look at his husband, merely went to the dressing chamber and proceeded to select his clothing for the day.

They met again in the common room that joined their suites and while they didn't speak, it was obvious they would go to the reception room together. They walked with awareness" it was impossible to forget they were constantly under surveillance, even well-meaning though it was, from their servants and retainers. So it was not unexpected that Akashi and Kuroko were holding hands, as newlyweds, some form of affectionate public demonstration was expected. When they were close to their destination, Akashi halted, and Kuroko looked over inquiringly.

Akashi paused and lowered his head to look down into Kuroko's eyes. "May I kiss you, Tetsuya? We did just have our wedding night, I think some evidence that we did pursue the evening to its expected ending might be in order and the both of us look rather too composed. I don't know what this messenger wants, but surely at least one purpose is to evaluate our strength, including the commitment of our new bond."

He wasn't surprised Akashi suggested such a thing, he even agreed with the idea behind it, but Kuroko knew it would put him at a disadvantage as well. Akashi did not kiss with the intent to allow one to keep one's mind focused. Or at least, he hadn't ever done so before. Still, they were in a hallway, surely it couldn't have the same effect as the near drugging kisses Akashi had managed when they were younger. He nodded his permission, but didn't vocalize it.

The smile that crossed Akashi's face was equally triumphant and proud" there was a reason they would work well together, after all. He slowly, but inevitably, backed Tetsuya against the wall in a way that seemed to bring a nearly unbearable sense of anticipation with each step. But once Tetsuya's back hit the wall, Akashi wasted no further time. Kuroko had expected a demanding, aggressive kiss but Akashi instead gently cradled his cheek with one hand while he began a gradual, devastating siege that was all the more effective for its patient courting. Akashi's body was pressed to his, not so tightly that he felt trapped, but Kuroko's senses were quickly consumed by Akashi in a way that felt both all too familiar and completely new" they had changed it was true, but there was something else here, a humming call from his body that couldn't help but remember how well they had fit together, once upon a time.

Kuroko couldn't stop his hands from reaching up and winding around Akashi's neck" he wasn't ready to sleep with Akashi but he wasn't some idle participant in this, either. He could feel his body relaxing into Akashi's and knew his lips were already swollen from Akashi's efforts. They may well have pursued this further, if a polite but strained cough hadn't sounded in the otherwise quiet hallway. It was difficult to break away from each other but the tone of that sound was exceptionally familiar" it was Midorima.

The tall and usually aloof looking male was studiously not meeting their eyes but simply reminded them they needed to meet with the messenger. He went ahead to take his place in the receiving hall and as he passed, Akashi turned back to Tetsuya. He surveyed his husband's appearance " Kuroko's cheeks were slightly flushed, his pupils dilated, and his mouth had the faintest suggestion of being kissed-bruised, while his hair was mussed; together it suggested rather what he'd wanted, but more than that, Akashi was reaffirmed in his pursuit of his husband " Tetsuya could not remain indifferent to him in this.

Before he could say anything, Kuroko leaned his head back, his breath coming out in a quiet but fast pant before he collected himself. "I think it worked. Our audience should have no trouble believing we just tumbled out of bed." His tone was scrupulously blank but even so his voice was not quite as steady as he probably wished.

Akashi laughed softly in acknowledgment of Tetsuya's preemptive strike as an attempt to reestablish distance between them. "Mmm, well done Tetsuya. Yes, I think we will be convincing."

They stared at each other for a moment, and a flash of something went through Tetsuya's eyes before he reached up and deliberately rifled his fingers through Akashi's hair. "More so now. Akashi-kun must look like he was affected, too." Tetsuya meant to say it teasingly, lightheartedly, as if it didn't matter, really " but it came out wistfully instead.

There was nothing to do then except move forward and they soon entered after being announced by the waiting steward.

End
file.